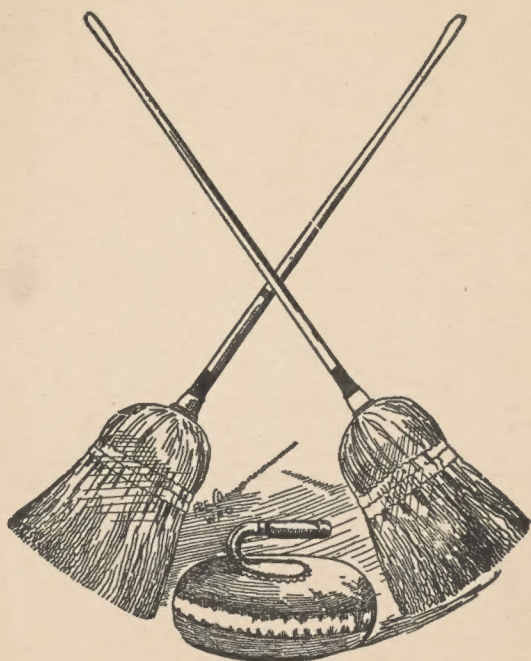


Curling In Canada



*Radio Talk by GORDON M. HUDSON
given over the CBC Network,
December 20th, 1937. Distributed
with the Compliments of The
Great-West Life Curling Club.*

**FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY BONSPIEL OF THE
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RADIO TALK ON

“CURLING IN CANADA”

by

GORDON M. HUDSON

DECEMBER 20, 1937 (CBC)

*Distributed with the Compliments of The Great-West
Life Curling Club*

CURLING in Canada dates back to 1759, and is believed to have been first played by Wolfe's soldiers, on the St. Lawrence River, after the capture of Quebec.

The game itself goes back to the sixteenth century, at least, but the actual history of its beginning seems obscure. It is commonly thought to have originated in Scotland, and, if that is not actually a fact, it certainly owes its development to that country. It was brought to Canada from Scotland, but except for the experiment at Quebec was not played until early in the nineteenth century when clubs were formed in Nova Scotia, Quebec and Ontario. The Royal Montreal Club, formed in 1807, is the oldest curling club in North America. The game was introduced to New Brunswick in 1854, when a club was formed at Fredericton. It reached Manitoba in 1875, and was quickly taken up in Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, so that, as early as 1884, curling had become general all over Canada.

The game has grown rapidly in this country until today we find there are twelve provincial Curling Associations, with a registered membership of over 26,000 curlers. Ten of these Associations are affiliated with the Dominion Curling Association, representing a total of 23,000 curlers. The Dominion Curling Association was formed three years ago, with the idea of bringing all curlers in Canada together in one organization. You can judge how well it has succeeded

when I tell you that Nova Scotia and Quebec are now the only provinces which are not affiliated. Senator John T. Haig, of Winnipeg, and Mr. E. P. Atkinson, of Toronto, have been President and Secretary, respectively, since it was organized. They are two of the most enthusiastic curlers in Canada and they are making a wonderful contribution to the game by their work for that organization.

The Dominion Curling Association and its members are affiliated with the Royal Caledonian Curling Club of Scotland. This Club was formed in 1839 and is really the Mother Club, as curlers all over the world are affiliated or connected with it in one way or another.

Curling has not been confined to the men, for, during the last twenty-five or thirty years, the fair sex have taken up the game in large numbers and now there are hundreds of ladies' curling clubs in Canada. In many of the smaller clubs in the West the ladies and men play together and their mixed competitions are a decided asset to the sporting and social life of the community.

While Scotland is the home of the game, and while the Royal Caledonian Curling Club is the parent organization, the greatest curling centre in the world today is the City of Winnipeg. It is the headquarters of the Manitoba Curling Association which annually holds its bonspiel there. This is the largest gathering of curlers in the world. For example last February the entry totalled 320 rinks—240 mens' and 80 ladies'. They had ten days of excellent sport in which keen competition, friendly rivalry and good fellowship predominated.

The first bonspiel was held in 1889 and has taken place annually since that time. Next February, the 50th Bonspiel will be held in Winnipeg and it is confidently expected that all attendance records will be broken. Well-informed curlers predict the entry will exceed 400 rinks. Curlers are expected to be in attendance from every province, as well as from the United States. In addition, the Manitoba Curling Association is fortunate that during this big bonspiel they will be favored by a visit of curlers from Scotland who will tour Canada this winter.

Bonspiels, of course, are not peculiar to Manitoba, nor the City of Winnipeg, but are held all over the country.

In New Brunswick, for instance, a provincial bonspiel is held each year with the different clubs playing the role of host in turn. All clubs participate and compete for the Ganong Trophy, which, in addition to individual prizes, carries with it the right to represent the Province in the Dominion Championships at Toronto.

Nova Scotia was one of the first provinces to take up curling and it is interesting to note that the Halifax Curling Club, established in 1824, is the third oldest club in the Dominion. Principally due to climatic conditions, curling does not usually start in the Maritimes until after Christmas but now that artificial ice makes it possible to lengthen the season, interest in the game has increased. This year, I am informed, there will be five clubs playing in Nova Scotia using artificial ice; two in Halifax, the Halifax Curling Club and the Mayflower Curling Club, with the others at Yarmouth, Truro and New Glasgow. The Johnson Cup, a single rink competition, is the leading curling event in that province and differs from the ordinary single rink event in other provinces. Six players are permitted to be on any Johnson Cup rink, four being active, while the other two may be substituted at any time during the game.

Organized curling is comparatively recent in Prince Edward Island, but interest in the game has increased considerably since 1936 when they first took part in the Dominion Championship play-downs. I understand their curling population has more than doubled since that time.

Turning to the Province of Quebec, we find one of the anomalies of curling in the "Iron" game, which centres in that province and in those sections of Ontario which are under the controlling jurisdiction of the Canadian Branch of the Royal Caledonian Curling Club, the governing body of the district. In no other place in the world are "Irons" played. Tradition tells us that the Iron "stones", irreverently termed "kettles" by the uninitiated, had their being in the love of Wolfe's Highlanders for the Grand Old Game. At the capture of

Quebec, the Highland garrison looked for winter sports on the frozen St. Lawrence. It was impossible to import their granite curling stones from the Motherland, so, the ingenious soldiery melted up old French cannon and moulded their own stones.

This, at least, is the story which is related of the origin of this game which differs from ordinary curling in the weight of the "stone", the irons being 20 pounds heavier than granites. For generations Quebec curlers have used "irons" and it would seem that the iron game would always be preserved in that section.

However, in recent years, the annual Quebec Bonspiel, played in Quebec City, sees more and more granite competition.

Artificial ice plants in Montreal and Quebec City have done much to foster the game and its development in the province. In the "townships" there is, possibly, the closest approach to the democratic curling spirit which is so typical of the West and the Northern Ontario zones. The Ormstown, Huntingdon, and similar Eastern Township clubs, might well be in some of the smaller communities of Western Canada.

In Quebec City, itself, we find a real French Canadian Club, the Jacques Cartier. Normally, the French Canadian has not been the most enthusiastic curler, although every club in the province has its French Canadian members, but the Jacques Cartier Club stands in a class by itself. It is primarily and essentially French, and proud of it.

Curling has long been a popular winter pastime in Ontario, and it is interesting to note that three clubs in that province have celebrated their centenary: Kingston, 1820; Fergus, 1834; Toronto, 1836, while the Galt and Guelph Clubs will celebrate their 100th anniversary this year. The Ontario Tankard is the most famous of curling trophies in that province and has been competed for, annually, since the founding of the Ontario Curling Association in 1874. Some of the sections of old Ontario are not favored with long winters, so due to the uncertainties of the weatherman, curlers could not be sure of

good hard ice. However, about twelve years ago, artificial ice was introduced and, today, they have seventeen clubs that curl entirely on artificial ice. Coincident with this came the Ontario Bonspiel. This is the outstanding curling event in the province, and is held annually in Toronto. This 'spiel, due to ice limitations, is restricted to 120 entries and is always filled. Saskatchewan is, without doubt, in point of numbers, the greatest curling province in the Dominion, having well in excess of 400 clubs, and a membership almost impossible to estimate. Two hundred and thirty-four of these clubs are in affiliation with the Saskatchewan Curling Association, whose headquarters are in Regina. It is in this city they hold their annual provincial bonspiel and, next to Winnipeg, it is the largest in Canada.

Alberta is one province that has two Associations: one in the south, with headquarters at Calgary, called the Alberta Branch of the Royal Caledonian Club, while the Northern portion of the province is served by the Alberta Curling Association, with headquarters at Edmonton. They hold annual bonspiels at Calgary and Edmonton, and the winners play off to determine a provincial champion.

Curling is carried on extensively in the interior of British Columbia with the greatest interest being shown in the Trail, Cranbrook, Fernie and Nelson Districts. At Vancouver, the game is popular and is played on artificial ice where they have an eight sheet rink.

There are hundreds of bonspiels held annually, by far the largest number being conducted in the West, where the long, cold winters make it virtually a curlers' paradise. Time, however, does not permit me to mention any but the large provincial 'spiels at which the champion rink is determined. This mention of provincial champion rinks leads to a discussion of the Dominion Curling Championship, now a feature of the Winter Sport Life of Canada.

Since March, 1927, when the inaugural Dominion Championship play-down for the Macdonald's Brier Tankard was staged, there has been gradually evolved a closely knit inter-provincial play, which makes curling unique in the sports

annals of this country. In no other sport is there such an equality, and such a gathering, as the annual Single Rink Championship matches staged at Toronto. Here we find every province of the Dominion represented by its champion rink, meeting on the grounds of absolute equality and bringing, in the wake of that meeting, a greater and more far-reaching Canadianism than is possible in any other sporting competition.

It took curling to develop such an equality. Each province, irrespective of size, curling prowess or support, has exactly the same chance as the other provinces. There is no "knock out" play. It is determined by the "round robin" method. Each province meets each other province and the winner is determined by the number of games actually won in the competition proper or any play-off which might be necessary through the creation of a tie.

The tenth rink, necessary to balance the schedule for the nine provinces, comes from Northern Ontario, regarded geographically and from the curling status, as separate from the remainder of Ontario. Incidentally, Northern Ontario has two governing bodies, the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Curling Association serving the mining areas, and the Northern Ontario Curling Association functioning in the Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury sections. Finalists from the bonspiels of both Associations meet on neutral ice at North Bay to determine the representative for the whole of Northern Ontario at the Dominion Curling Championships.

Creation of the Dominion Championship play-down for Inter-provincial honors has been followed by the greatest development in curling. The action of the Macdonald Tobacco Company in making possible this annual meeting of every Canadian Province has improved and developed the game from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

In at least eight of the divisions represented by the Dominion Play-down, British Consols Trophies are used to determine the nomination of the provincial championship rink. These championships are playing their part in improving, consolidating, and smoothing out the differences of the provincial

curlers and, with the Dominion honors as the ultimate goal, the competition throughout the play-downs becomes keener and better each year.

Nova Scotia took the honors the first year, and since that time the Dominion Crown and the Macdonald's Brier Tankard have come seven times to Manitoba, once to Ontario, and twice, including the 1937 play-down, to Alberta.

Fraternizing of the curlers from every province has brought in its wake the establishment of the Dominion Curling Association, which is directly responsible for the visit of the Scottish curlers to Canada. It has brought order out of chaos in some of the provincial bodies, and has smoothed over some of the internal strife which can be expected as part of any sports' endeavour when governing bodies have to be considered. Rules have been unified and playing conditions improved. In Eastern Canada, particularly, more than a score of artificial ice plants for curling clubs can be directly attributed to the influence of these Dominion play-downs and the subsequent development of the provincial championship tests to determine the standard bearer.

This winter, through the efforts of the Dominion Curling Association, Canada is to be favored by a visit of curlers from Scotland. A party of 30 will reach Halifax on December 31st, and will spend the next two months touring the country. They will visit, in turn, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, where they will curl at Halifax and St. John. From there they will go to Quebec, Montreal and Ottawa. Old Ontario will next be visited, where their activities will centre around Toronto. This will be followed by a trip to Western Canada, which will be broken by a stop at Fort William. From there they will go direct to the Prairies, playing at Regina, Calgary, Edmonton and Saskatoon. Their tour is so timed that they will arrive at Winnipeg on February 11th, at the Peak of Manitoba's 50th Anniversary Bonspiel, which is expected to be the biggest event in Curling History. From Winnipeg the party will go to the mining areas of Northern Ontario. They will then visit Utica, New York, and Boston, Mass., before sailing from St. John on February 25th. This trip is

being looked forward to eagerly by curlers all over Canada, and should give the game a tremendous boost. It will also do considerable good by cementing friendships between Canada and the Old Land, and will give our visitors an insight into conditions which prevail in this country.

Briefly, I have tried to give you a picture of curling in Canada as it is today. It is a game that can be played and enjoyed by the young, the middle-aged and the old. In fact, one of my clubmates openly boasts that he is the best curler in the country over 85 years of age. A Curling Club is a distinct asset to any community, so much so that the Hon. J. G. Gardiner, Minister of Agriculture for Canada and formerly Premier of Saskatchewan, recently made the statement that "Nothing has done so much to keep up the morale of the people of Western Canada during the recent drought years as the game of curling."

No other game played leads to the social understanding, the good fellowship, the respect for opponents. While rivalry is keen, at times very keen, the fellowship is such that a good shot is generally applauded, and a hard luck shot regretted. It brings together men from all walks of life and from all parts of the country and, perhaps, no other game played is as truly democratic. On the ice it is not "what you are" but "what can you do". The game has best been described as "A united brotherhood, within which peer and peasant are equal".

